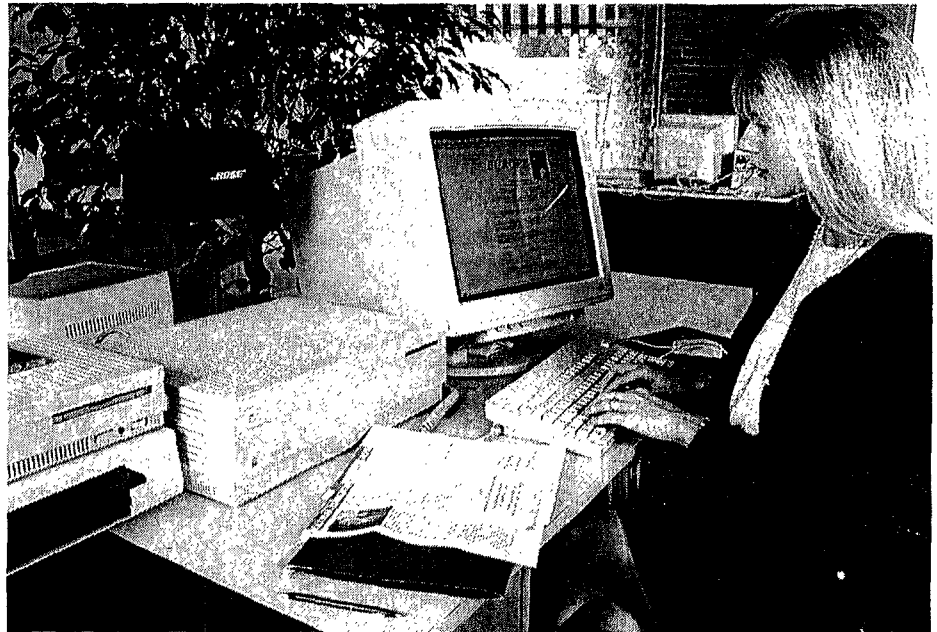


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CD-38459



STAFFING OF STATE OFFICES OF THE INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN



September 2002

This study and report were funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, grant number 90C00898.

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STAFFING OF STATE OFFICES OF THE INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the public child welfare system has witnessed increasing numbers of children and families with complex and multiple needs, challenges posed by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) with its emphasis on eliminating interjurisdictional barriers to placement and difficulties in training and retaining an experienced workforce. New legislative requirements, as well as changes in the nature and magnitude of the populations served by the child welfare system, prompted the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) to update two previous studies (1980 and 1988) on the staffing, policies and procedures of Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) offices throughout the nation. The update also helped APHSA determine the impact of these changes on ICPC staff's ability to remain skilled and knowledgeable about its responsibilities and to discharge them in compliance with the ICPC and federal law.

The survey was designed, in part, to capture the effect of ASFA on the workload of ICPC offices. Enacted in 1997, ASFA is the first federal legislation that emphasizes the importance of removing barriers to timely placement of children across state lines. Among its many provisions, three address interjurisdictional placements. First, ASFA requires state plans to specify that a state will not deny or delay the placement of a child for adoption with an approved family outside its jurisdiction. Second, state plans must contain assurances the state will effectively use cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placement for waiting children. Third, the act establishes a penalty against federal foster care funds for states that are found to deny or delay the placement of a child for adoption when an approved family is waiting outside the jurisdiction, or that fails to promptly grant a fair hearing to an individual who alleges such a violation. The results of the 2001 study are the basis of this report. It is to be shared with child welfare directors and compact administrators to provide information that could have a positive impact on their ability to understand and cope with the changes and challenges they face. The report is designed to provide some indication of the manner in which state ICPC offices carry out their responsibilities to administer the ICPC, contrasts between the 1988 and 2001 surveys in both staffing levels and numbers of referrals processed, information on training and on coordination with other compacts and the child protective services (CPS) system, as well as the percentage of time spent in pursuing various ICPC activities. In addition, the report provides information on innovations implemented by ICPC offices and staff perceptions of their continuing needs. Knowing the problems and constraints encountered by other states and the corrective, innovative practices some have instituted could be affirming, reassuring, and inspirational to ICPC offices struggling to meet unprecedented demands.

This is a report on current office staffing and activities of ICPC offices throughout the nation. It is based on responses to a survey conducted in late 2001 by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and funded by an Adoption Opportunities grant from the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was submitted to officials in the 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia who are party to the compact. Responses were received from officials in 38 states, the same number (but not necessarily the same state) as participated in the 1988 survey.

To provide a full picture of the administration of ICPC offices, enable administrators to determine the strengths and weakness of compact operations, and provide information that could document staffing and budget requests, the survey requested ICPC offices to:

- Provide the total number, categories, and responsibilities assigned to ICPC offices;
- List the kinds of ICPC-related training provided to staff and other key participants in the interstate placement process;
- Describe the coordination procedures and processes with the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA) and inter- and intrastate CPS referrals;
- Identify the major ICPC cases, work responsibilities, and proportion of time involved in each;
- Specify the impact of the Internet on numbers of and time taken to process adoption cases;
- Provide information on contracting;
- Provide statistics on number of ICPC requests received and sent, and processing standards;
- Describe innovative practices to address workload and staffing problems; and
- Specify desired assistance to improve job performance.

FINDINGS

Comparisons are made between 1988 and 2001 data. Caution is needed in interpreting the aggregate information because although the number of responding states in each year was 38, in many instances, they are not the same states, making only the broadest conclusions possible about comparisons between the two surveys and years.

Staffing Levels

Learning the relationship between staffing levels and numbers of cases is central to determining whether numbers of staff have kept pace with numbers of cases, enabling states to comply with the compact and ASFA requirements. Without adequate staff, compliance is problematic, with placement delays often a result. The following chart compares staffing levels in 1988 and 2001.

**STAFFING:
THE WAY IT WAS THEN AND THE WAY IT IS NOW**

Total Number of Professional and Support Staff	1988 (N=38)	2001 (N=38)
Number of Professional Staff	108	115
Number of Support Staff	79	48
Total Number of All Staff	187	163

The total overall staff decrease, discounting the differences in the responding states, in number of professional and support staff assigned to the 38 ICPC offices was 16 (from 187 to 163), while the average number of staff per office declined by .6 (from 4.9 to 4.3). The overall number of support staff decreased by 31 between 1988 and 2001.

Of interest is information on the 25 states responding in both 1988 and 2001. The following chart depicts staff increases and decreases in those states between the two years of the study, as well as changes in the past two years.

STAFFING INCREASES AND DECREASES IN 25 STATES			
Number States Showing:	Increase	No Change	Decrease
Over 13 Years (1988-2001)	13	—	12
During Last 2 Years (1999-2001)	12	8	5

The number of states with staff increases or decreases in the 13 years between the two surveys is almost the same. Encouraging to note is a more recent trend in the past two years, with only five of the 25 reporting staff decreases.

The following chart provides additional information on the compact office staffing levels. It shows aggregate, but nonidentifying, comparisons between staffing levels in 38 state ICPC offices in 1988 and 2001.

AGGREGATE COMPARISONS BETWEEN STAFFING LEVELS		
NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES	NUMBER OF STATE OFFICES	
	(N=38) 1988	(N=38) 2001
0.00 to 1.00	8	6
1.01 to 2.00	10	9
2.01 to 3.00	5	3
3.01 to 4.00	4	7
4.01 to 5.00	7	7
5.01 to 6.00	2	0
More than 6.01	2	6

Of import is the fact that 15 state offices had between three and more than six staff in 1988, while in 2001, this number had increased to 20 states. This increase, however, is tempered by a reference below to non-ICPC responsibilities held by a majority of the responding states in the 2001 survey. These have the effect of diminishing the actual number of hours the specified full-time employees (FTEs) are available to perform ICPC duties.

Responsibilities of ICPC Staff

Work Activities and Responsibilities. The responsibilities of a compact administrator are clearly outlined in the *Training Manual for Administrators and Liaisons*, developed under the Adoption Opportunities

grant and distributed to the compact office in each state. Among the duties specified are the enforcement of the compact and management of ICPC office functions, including conducting formal training sessions, upholding the law, and maintaining quarterly statistics. To determine if state ICPC staff are discharging these responsibilities, the survey specified several work activities and asked states the overall percentage of related staff time involved. The chart below depicts the major activities and responses. According to survey respondents, 50 percent of ICPC staff time is spent on outgoing and incoming requests and consulting with in-state workers, 9 percent are able to communicate with other compact administrators. Many ICPC duties crucial to fulfilling the requirements specified in the manual referenced above receive limited attention, most notably instituting corrective action when violations occur, reviewing incoming home studies, monitoring home studies, and training discussed below.

Agency respondents did not answer a question about the time spent entering data and it is, therefore, not noted in the chart. Whether the lack of response is attributable to the unavailability of staff to perform this duty or the lack of technology is unclear.

ICPC WORK ACTIVITY	PERCENT OF TOTAL STAFF TIME SPENT ON ICPC TASKS (N=35)
Reviewing outgoing requests and cases	18.8
Processing incoming requests	17.5
Consulting with my state's local workers	14.0
Communicating with other compact administrators to resolve placement issues	9.1
Consulting/providing technical assistance to private child-placing agency staff	7.6
Opening, sorting mail, filing	5.9
Training (informal and formal)	5.1
Consulting or providing technical assistance to court/judicial personnel	4.1
Monitoring supervisory reports	4.0
Reviewing incoming home studies	3.1
Initiating corrective action when a violation occurs	0.8
Appearing in court on ICPC matters	0.7
Monitoring supervisory reports	4.0

Time Involved

Private vs. Public Referrals. To gauge the differential impact of the time spent on public vs. private agency referrals, the survey asked states about the time taken to process each type of referral. In the 38 responding states, 24 percent of the referrals were for private placements, which 60 percent of these states reported involved more time to process than public placements. Also involving time beyond that expended on routine adoption cases are adoptions through the Internet, with 11 of the 19 states that reported an increase in such adoptions stating they consumed more time.

Shared Responsibilities. Recognizing that not all staff in ICPC offices work exclusively on ICPC matters, the survey asked for an accounting of states in which the ICPC office has responsibilities in addition to administering the ICPC. Twenty-six states reported that its offices handle more than the ICPC alone, which indicates these offices must carry additional workloads. The range of time spent by state offices on non-ICPC duties is very broad: from 2 percent to 95 percent, with the exact percentage depending on the particular state. Clerical staff in 15 state offices report that a majority of their time is allocated to non-ICPC duties. Some of these duties involve the administration of other compacts: seven responding states also administer the Interstate Compact on Juveniles and five also administer ICAMA. These data are evidence that the number of staff assigned to state ICPC offices does not present a complete, accurate picture of the ICPC office staffing pattern.

Collecting and Tracking Statistical Information

Data Collection. Relating referral increases or decreases to numbers of staff is critical to understanding workload issues. Interstate referral increases without corresponding staff increases create imbalances that result in placement delays or the inability to discharge the many responsibilities of an ICPC office. Numbers of cases are reported by the states are estimates only, however, and are therefore subject to question. When the 2001 survey was completed, only a small number of states collected and compiled actual ICPC statistics manually or by computer. The ability to collect and record statistics, however, may be improving. Under an Adoption Opportunities grant, a new case tracking system was developed, automating data collection and submission. With increasing distribution and training on and use of the system, complete and reliable information should be forthcoming.

Number of Referrals. The following chart illustrates the estimated total and the per state average of quarterly number of referrals the reporting states sent and received in 1988 and 2001, and the percentage increase between the two years.

QUARTERLY STATISTICS: A COMPARISON

	1988 STUDY (N=28)		2001 STUDY (N=26)		Percent Increase
	Total	Average/State	Total	Average/State	
Referrals Received	3,541	126.46	5,627	216.42	71
Referrals Sent	3,949	141.03	5,586	315.00	52

Despite the fact that two fewer states responded in 2001 than in 1988, the increase in referrals, both received and sent, is dramatic. In contrast, during the time between the two surveys, total ICPC staff in the responding states decreased by about 14.7 percent. This growing imbalance between staff and workload makes regulatory compliance problematic.

Time Involved. Case numbers alone are incomplete indicators of volume of work because the time it takes to process each case is an equally important factor. It can be hypothesized that this time increased between 1988 and 2001, as it did between 1980 and 1988. This hypothesis and the increase in referrals are considered together in an analysis of staffing and workload patterns.

Staff Training

In order for staff to develop the requisite skills to discharge ICPC duties responsibly and accurately, adequate training on the compact and its requirements is essential. APHSA, recognizing the need to assess the nature and extent of training to determine its completeness and accuracy, included the development of training manuals and provision of training in the proposal that secured the Adoption Opportunities grant in 1999. Funded by the grant, three training manuals have been developed and disseminated, and semiannual Train-the-Trainer sessions have been conducted, as well as basic and advanced training for several years at the annual meetings of the Association of Administrators of ICPC (AAICPC). The Train-the-Trainer sessions develop a cadre of trained individuals who can, in turn, provide training to others. However, in late 2001, only nine states reported providing formal training to new ICPC staff within six months of employment, and 12 states provide no formal training for new workers. Thirteen states report that the only formal training new ICPC workers receive is at the annual meeting, reinforcing the value of the premeeting training sessions. Training for non-ICPC is more widespread: 31 states report that state or local agency workers receive formal training, while 19 states report that such training is also provided to private agency staff. In addition, 11 states provide formal training to contractors and to judges, although the extent of the training is unknown.

Coordination Efforts

To determine if coordination efforts and custody investigations have an impact on ICPC staff's ability to discharge their responsibilities, the survey inquired about relationships with the Interstate Compact on Juveniles (ICJ), the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA), the child protective service system, and divorce custody investigations.

ICJ. Twenty-nine states responded to the question of whether their ICPC offices report having formal procedures to coordinate referrals with ICJ. While five of these states have no such procedures, in the other 24, varying directives are followed ranging from informal consultation with or referral to ICJ to the same office administering both compacts.

ICAMA. Twenty-four states responded to the question about coordination with ICAMA, with three additional states reporting they are not yet members of ICAMA. In five states, the same office administers both compacts, while no procedures are in place in three states. The others follow varying procedures to coordinate referrals.

Child Protective Services (CPS). With regard to intrastate CPS alerts, 18 of the 30 states responding to the question of procedures in these cases report that such referrals do not come to their office. Most of the remaining states send the referral to the ICPC office in the sending state, occasionally after intrastate discussion between the ICPC office and the local agency. In the 30 states responding to the question of interstate CPS referrals, seven report that such referrals do not come to their office. Most of the other state ICPC offices forward these referrals to the local CPS unit or other appropriate office.

Custody Investigations. The impact of divorce custody investigations on their ICPC office workload was determined to be minimal. Thirty-four states responded to the question of their procedures in handling such cases, with 30 stating they have no involvement in this type of case or that they forward such referrals to the courts, field offices, the local department, or private licensed social workers. A few states return the referral with a letter suggesting contact with the National Association of Social Workers, mental health professionals, or private agencies. Only one state reported handling the divorce custody referral in the same manner as other referrals, with the exception that the local agency responds directly to the sender and not through the ICPC office.

INNOVATIONS AND NEEDS

APHSA recognizes office practices and procedures need to be modified and new methods instituted if ICPC offices are to cope with the increased volume of work. Sharing state practices permits states to become aware of activities pursued by others and gives them opportunity for replication. Fifteen states responded to a question about innovative practices:

- Six states instituted office changes (employing additional staff, specifying job procedures and duties, redistributing the workload, implementing the new automated tracking system);
- Five states are now assigning cases alphabetically by counties; and
- Four states have increased their use of contracting (although they report it rarely reduces staff time).

Other practices noted included providing training to field entities and assigning one staff to assure completion of all ICPC procedures before forwarding.

Documentation of the needs perceived by staff eager to perform their duties with maximum efficiency provides information to planners and administrators as they develop budget requests and inform legislators. Thirty-seven states responded to the question about the kinds of assistance they need to perform the job better:

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- 75 percent of the respondents expressed a need for technological assists,
 - 25 percent wanted more training,
 - 65 percent recognized the need for more training for others (local workers, private agency staff, judges), and
 - 68 percent stated their offices needed more staff.

Additional requests were for newer computer equipment; a computerized tracking system (which has since been developed and made available to states, as noted above), and for the ICPC state web pages to include more validated information on foster care and adoption, state eligibility criteria, obtaining foster care medical cards, and various state requirements for licensing and paying relative foster caregivers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Comparisons between the findings of the 1988 study and the 2001 study are problematic. Although the number of responding states was 38 in each year, only 25 states were the same, raising questions of comparability. In addition, many of the questions asked in the current study were not asked in 1988. Therefore, despite the original intent of the study, the findings cannot be considered an update of the earlier ones but, rather, a picture of the current staffing, workload, and procedures of ICPC offices. Also, these findings are limited because most of the statistics provided are estimates only. Although case numbers alone do not give a comprehensive workload picture, the study did not request information on the time taken to perform any of the activities specified in the listing of ICPC Work Activities. In addition, many of the respondents indicated that ICPC staff are often responsible for non-ICPC duties taking an unspecified amount of time. Therefore, more information is needed before sound conclusions about office staffing can be drawn.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The 38 states that responded to the 2001 APHSA survey are experiencing dramatic increases in ICPC referrals, contrasted with a smaller decline in numbers of support staff, which, however, may be offset at least in part by technological improvements and assists. Additional compensating factors facilitating case processing may be seen in the coordination with other compacts. Impacting the workload, in addition to referral increases, are the non-ICPC responsibilities borne by many compact offices. The imbalance between workload and staff makes it difficult to allocate time to performing required ICPC activities, such as reviewing incoming home studies and monitoring supervisory reports. Also slighted is training, especially for new workers, which affects the skills and knowledge of the workforce and their ability to meet the requirements of an ICPC office. It is not surprising that 62.5 percent of the responding states report that they do not consider the staffing of their ICPC offices adequate for the volume of cases. (The impact of divorce custody investigations and CPS alerts is minimal. With regard to coordinating efforts, although questions were not asked about the time involved, it can be hypothesized that such efforts expedite, rather than extend, the time for processing of referrals.)

The automated case-tracking system, referenced above, should reduce the time states spend in processing and tracking cases, and optimize their capacity to collect, report, and maintain statistics. The Adoption Opportunities grant has made possible the development and distribution of the system, and has provided

training to the increasing number of states that have implemented it. The grant has also funded extensive staff training on the compact, compensating for the lack of time the states have been able to devote to this activity. APHSA, therefore, has been able to assist states in coping with the referral/staff imbalance.

In this time of state budget deficits and stringent fiscal constraints, staff increases seem unlikely. At the same time, ASFA requirements mandate increased emphasis on overcoming geographical barriers to placement. With the workload thus increased, states still need to be dependent on the innovations they have already instituted, which maximize the productivity of current staff, and whatever assistance the ICPC Secretariat can provide to meet federal mandates and cope with the increased volume of work. Using the ICPC training manuals, taking advantage of training opportunities, and adopting the computerized tracking system should facilitate understanding of and compliance with federal law and proper ICPC procedures, tracking cases, maintaining statistics (which could help establish a case for staff commensurate with volume of work), and communicating with other key players in the interstate placement process.